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SUBJECT: GOC SETS UP COMMISSION FOR ADVANCEMENT OF
AFRO-COLOMBIANS

SUMMARY

¶1. On October 29, 2007, President Uribe issued a decree creating the Commission for the Advancement of Afro-Colombians which will identify barriers to Afro-Colombian socio-economic advancement and make recommendations on ways to overcome them. Vice President Santos will chair the commission, and the President of the Association of Afro-Colombian Municipalities (AMANUFRO), Oscar Gamboa, will serve as Executive Director. A wide range of ministries will participate, as well as representatives from industry, academia, the Afro-Colombian Congressional Caucus, and civil society. The GOC has also invited prominent individuals such as Kofi Annan, Colin Powell, and Oprah Winfrey to support the initiative. END SUMMARY.

URIBE CREATES COMMISSION

¶2. President Uribe issued a decree on October 29 creating the Commission for the Advancement of Afro-Colombians. The purpose of the Commission is to evaluate the quality of life of the Afro-Colombian community, identify barriers that hinder their social and economic advancement, and make recommendations to overcome them. Uribe tasked the Commission to focus on the protection and exercise of Afro-Colombians' civil rights, especially for women and children. The decree stipulates that the Commission will have a term of six months, and its members will convene twice during that period. At the end of six months, the Commission will present its recommendations on how to remove existing barriers.

OSCAR GAMBOA TO LEAD COMMISSION

¶3. The GOC announced on December 7 that a prominent member of the Afro-Colombian community, Oscar Gamboa, would serve as the Commission's Executive Director. The Commission will be funded and housed by the office of Vice President Santos. Gamboa, who is also the President of the Association of Afro-Colombian Municipalities (AMANUFRO), said the Commission will be formally launched at a ceremony in mid-February in San Andres. Still, some of its members are already working. Currently, Gamboa shuttles between his home in Cali and his office in the Vice-President's office.

A MULTI-SECTOR EFFORT UNDERWAY

¶4. Other members of the Commission include Vice President Santos, who serves as President, the Minister of Interior and Justice, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Social Protection, the Minister of Culture, the Director of the National Planning Department, the Director of the Department of Administrative Services, the High Commissioner for Social Action and International Cooperation, the Director of the Presidential Human Rights Program and the Director of Ethnic Affairs in the Ministry of Interior and Justice. One representative each from the Afro-Colombian Congressional Caucus, AMANUFRO, and the Afro-Colombian community councils will attend the Commission's meetings as invited guests.

¶5. Gamboa said the members of Colombia's Afro-Colombian Congressional caucus, a group of black legislators from various parties, has not yet agreed on who would represent them. The representatives of academia and industry will be chosen by the Vice President. Gamboa said despite some resistance from Afro-Colombian groups, he will invite some individuals from outside the Afro-Colombian community to participate. He believes this will facilitate acceptance of the Commission's recommendations by broader Colombian society. For example, he wants University de los Andes President Carlos Angulo to represent the academic community. Gamboa added that President Uribe has sent letters to African-American lawmakers--as well as other prominent figures like Oprah Winfrey, Kofi Annan, and Colin Powell--asking them to support the initiative.

FOCUS ON ATTAINABLE GOALS

¶6. The Commission plans to focus on attainable goals, rather than focusing only on complaints of the Afro-Colombian community. Gamboa said the first task would be to document all the commitments the GOC has made regarding Afro-Colombians, and to identify which of those commitments have yet to be implemented. Gamboa said he had accepted the position because he saw it as an opportunity for Afro-Colombians to make real progress. He praised President Uribe for taking this "significant step" in improving the lives of Afro-Colombians, but noted that further resources would be needed to fund the commission's work.

Brownfield